

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

1
Ag 84 Pro
#818

SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE



PA NO. 818 / SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



THE SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE (SCS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), works with people in stopping the tragic and costly waste of land and water resources and in putting to good use these prime national assets.

Farm fields damaged by wind and water erosion, streams and reservoirs choked with sediment, flooded bottom land, water-short cities, subdivisions stripped of vegetation, bare eroding roadbanks—these are some of the problems on which SCS gives help.

As the countryside continues to undergo change—to satisfy not only farm needs but also those of expanding industry and population—SCS specialists and county and State governments, community-planning agencies, and other institutions and organizations in rapidly developing rural-fringe areas are working together more and more to insure proper land and water management.

SCS work is directed by an administrator and staff in Washington, D.C. Conservationists at the State offices and a director of the Caribbean area are responsible for field operations and relations with State agencies and organizations.

When SCS was established by Congress in 1935, the dust was blowing out of the plains, and vast acreages of once-bountiful grassland lay waste. Elsewhere either drought parched the land or rainwater ran wildly off tilled fields and washed good topsoil into streams, filling them to overflowing. Lowland was flooded regularly, and gullied landscapes were a common sight. Much of our agricultural land was in a critical state. It had been for years.

Congress had formally recognized the need for Federal help in solving land and water problems in 1929 with an appropriation for soil-erosion investigations by USDA. Additional money was appropriated in years following.

The Soil Erosion Service was established in 1933 on a temporary basis. Two years later a definite Federal policy of soil and water conservation was embodied in SCS.

Farmers organized the first local conservation districts in 1937 under State laws, and through these districts SCS began to carry out various conservation programs authorized by Congress.

Today, 3,012 soil and water conservation districts embrace more than 3,100,000 farms and ranches and other land holdings. They cover more than 1.7 billion acres. The land area of the United States mainland is about 1.9 billion acres; of this, about 1.5 billion acres is privately owned. Only 1.1 billion acres is land classified as farms and ranches by the Bureau of the Census.

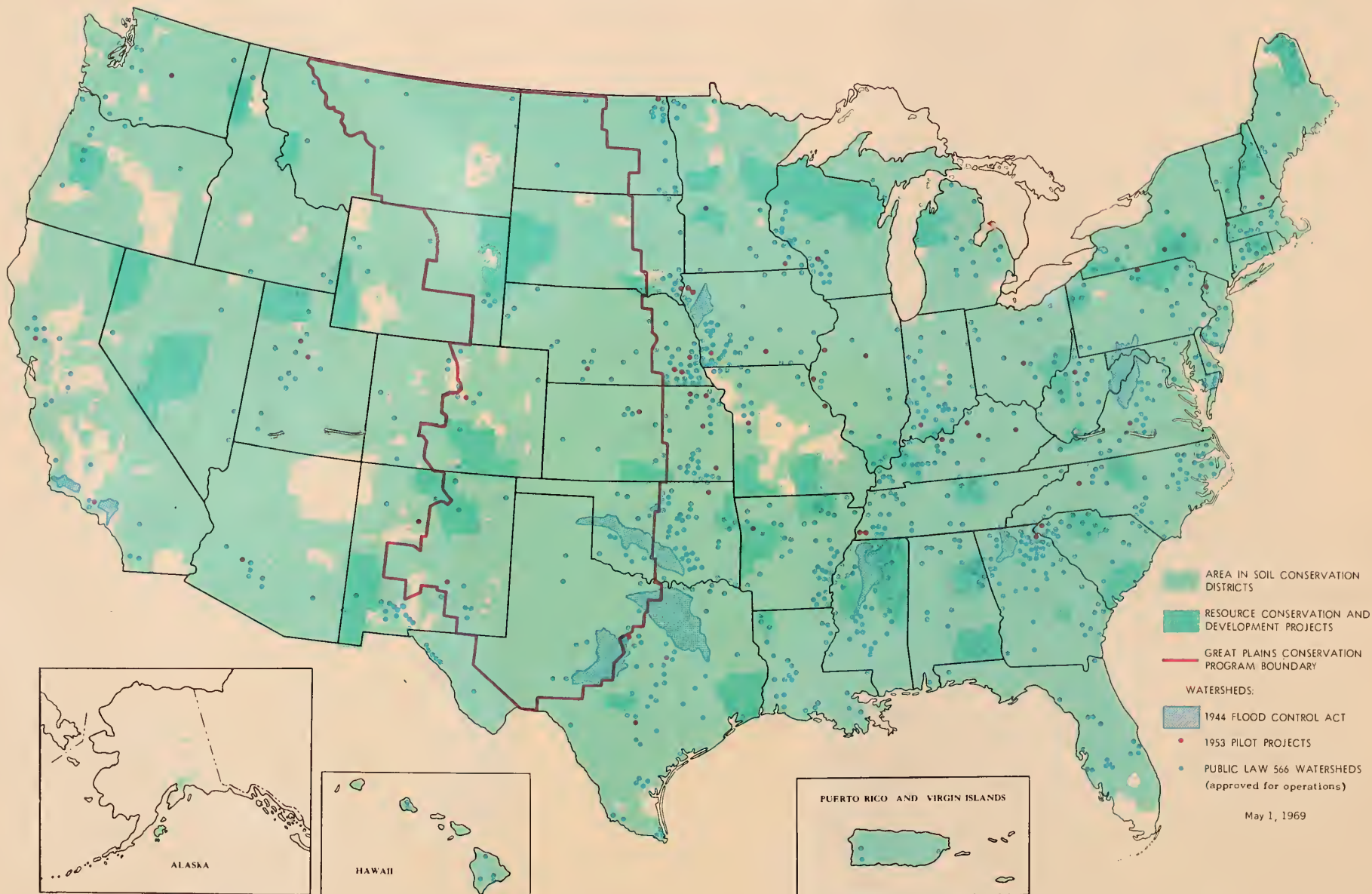
About 2 million land users are cooperators in the conservation districts. SCS has helped cooperators work out conservation plans for more than a half billion acres.

SCS, through conservation districts, gives technical help to landowners who want to change from one land use to another, such as cropland to pasture or forest or from agricultural production to income-producing recreation or wildlife conservation. The aim is to insure that the best possible use is made of the land.

SCS helps farmers and ranchers work out a conservation plan for their land and helps them apply conservation measures that require special skills or knowledge. Conservation measures, such as terraces, grassed waterways, ponds, windbreaks, and stripcropping, help hold down the soil, conserve water, protect crops and livestock, and promote agricultural economy.



SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE ACTIVITIES





Floods, erosion, and water shortages affect everybody in a watershed—the area that drains into a river, lake, or stream. So both city and rural dwellers benefit from soil and water conservation measures. This fact is well illustrated by the small-watershed program, under which SCS provides technical and financial assistance in building dams and reservoirs. These hold back the flow of small rivers and streams in periods of heavy runoff, and store water for agricultural, municipal, industrial, wildlife, and recreational needs.

SCS helps landowners in the watershed apply soil conservation measures on land above flood-prevention structures to protect them from sediment damage. These measures must precede installation of the flood-prevention structures.

Watershed projects are begun by local people and carried out largely through local effort. Project sponsors include conservation districts, county boards, town councils, and other groups.

A national program aimed at preventing disastrous floods in our river valleys began with the Flood Control Act of 1944, under which 11 watershed projects embracing about 30 million acres were established. These 11 large watersheds were divided into smaller watersheds for more efficient planning.

The benefits of the 1944 Act were extended by the 54 pilot watershed projects authorized in 1953 and the projects authorized by Public Law 566 enacted in 1954, which now number more than 800 and cover more than 48 million acres.

Cooperative river-basin studies are being conducted throughout the country by SCS and other Federal and State agencies on an individual watershed and broad regional basis for sound water-resource planning. The studies provide information on regionwide water and related resource needs, potentials for economic development, and quantity and quality of water available for various uses, and on how to approach land and water resource problems.

Resource conservation and development projects, which are initiated and sponsored by conservation districts, local government agencies, or other groups, boost local economies by helping speed up conservation and resource development activities. The first projects were authorized in 1964 and 51 have been designated. Applications for assistance have been submitted for many more areas.

For many years farmers and ranchers have been guided in the use of their land by soil surveys. Today community planners and builders are depending more and more on soil survey information to guide them in using land for houses, factories, schools, and airports. In making soil surveys, SCS cooperates with State agricultural experiment stations and other agencies. About 760 million acres are covered by soil surveys—about a third of the United States—and more than 50 million acres are being mapped each year.

The Great Plains conservation program, which is administered by SCS, provides long-term technical assistance and cost sharing directly to farmers and ranchers for the installation of conservation measures that help control wind and water erosion and improve the land.

SCS plant-materials centers assemble, screen, and increase shrubs, trees, and grasses that have possible value





in soil and water conservation. Suitable plants are turned over to commercial growers after successful field testing. These plants help beautify roadsides, river banks, and other areas as well as hold the soil in place. They provide forage and food and shelter for wildlife and enhance recreation areas.

Snow surveys and water-supply forecasting serve the West that depends for its water on snowfall in high mountains. SCS snow-survey teams, cooperating with other Federal and State agencies, measure snow depth and water content on selected snow courses. Their information is combined with weather and streamflow data from other sources. In this way all available information regarding water supplies from the snow areas is presented in the most economical and useful way.

SCS helps farmers and ranchers design and establish certain conservation practices for which USDA's agricultural conservation program provides cost-sharing payments. SCS also reviews technical phases of loan applications and assists with conservation projects carried out under loans to landowners from the Farmers Home Administration.

SCS gives facts about soil and water conservation to educational and other public and private agencies, institutions, and organizations and to writers and publishers. SCS publications, motion pictures, and visual aids are helpful in training teachers and leaders.

Information on soil resources, land use, probable changes in land use, and soil and water conservation treatments needed in every county is included in the National Inventory of Soil and Water Conservation Needs for which SCS has USDA leadership. Periodic surveys are made to keep this inventory up-to-date.

In these ways the Soil Conservation Service applies the skills, knowledge, and experience of its scientists and technicians to the varied and complex task of promoting the efficient use of soil and water so that every acre of land and every gallon of usable water will be available to sustain a dynamic economy and an increasing population.